JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY

ESPECIALLY

THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

BY

HERMAN HARRELL HORNE

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JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY
Especially
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

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To President Walter D. Allcorn
Author of The Minister and the Teacher
with the hearty regard of
Aug. 30, 1931 Herman H. Horne

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JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY
Especially
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY[1]

I

DR. DEWEY himself lists his volume on THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY as the eleventh and the latest of his "principal publications."[2] Among the main topics that have previously engaged his attention are: the school and society, ethics, the influence of Darwin, psychology, democracy and education, logic, reconstruction in philosophy, human nature and conduct, and the public and its problems. Coming at the end of such an array of notable studies, the volume on THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY is valuable as a somewhat encyclopedic summary of them all.

II

Dr. Dewey's style of writing in his later works is difficult. He himself attributes this to the influence of the great transition in his life from absolutism to his present experimentalism. On this point he writes: "The marks, the stigmata, of the struggle to weld together the characteristics of a formal theoretic interest and the material of a maturing experience of contacts with realities also showed themselves, naturally, in style of writing and manner of presentation. During the time when the

[1] This paper is based on three lectures given at the Vermont Congregational Conference, September 15–17, 1930, and on the opening address given at the Boston University School of Religious Education and Social Service, September 18, 1930.

[2] See this list at the end of this paper, quoted from Adams and Montague, *Contemporary American Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 27, N. Y., 1930.

schematic interest predominated, writing was comparatively easy; there were even compliments upon the clearness of my style. Since then thinking and writing have been hard work."[1] On this point, however, it may be remarked that some absolutists, like Hegel, have written obscurely, and some experimentalists, like James, have written lucidly. So the question of Dr. Dewey's style, which has kept his books from a reading proportionate to their importance, remains somewhat of a problem.

III

Speaking in general terms, it may be remarked at the outset that Dr. Dewey's QUEST FOR CERTAINTY might more descriptively be called: TRYSTING WITH UNCERTAINTY. The reason is, the quest is futile because there is in our world no certainty to find. The quest leads to no conquest.

The sub-title of this treatise is: "A Study of the Relation of Knowledge to Action." The general position maintained on this point is the pragmatic one that knowledge is secondary in time and importance to action which is primary; that is, we know what we do and we do not do what we first know. The basic thesis of the whole argument is: Man's mistaken desire for certainty, which he can't have, has led him to separate knowledge from action, which he should never have done. This is the voluntaristic tradition of Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, and Schopenhauer rather than the intellectualistic position of Hegel, the Cairds, and Royce. (Not that Dr. Dewey is any man's disciple.) The act, the event, change, are primary. In the beginning was the Act.

The main argument in the book may be summed up in the following eleven propositions:

1. There is no escape from peril.

[1] Adams and Montague, op. cit., p. 17.

2. Philosophy's search for the immutable has ended in failure.

3. In the conflict of authorities between science and religion, science is to be accepted.

4. The art of acceptance as practiced by the Greek philosophy and the Christian religion is to be rejected, and the art of control as practiced by science is to be adopted.

5. Real ideas are always at work, never being idle, and suffering no unemployment, though they sometimes play.

6. The play of ideas, in mathematics and logic, is symbolic of work.

7. The seat of intellectual authority is in the consequences to which ideas lead, i.e., the scientific method itself.

8. The human intelligence should be naturalized as a part of the process of change and de-natured as a mirror of reality.

9. Method, especially the method of experimental inquiry, holds supremacy.

10. The good is not existent nor pre-existent but is to be constructed by intelligent human action.

11. The Copernican revolution, as wrought by Dr. Dewey, not Kant, makes knowing to revolve about existence, not existence to revolve about knowing.

IV

We will not stop to criticize the picture until it has been drawn in more detail. The argument of the discussion runs as follows:

1. An unchanging order does not exist. Men came to believe in such an order for social and psychological reasons which no longer obtain. These were mainly due to the aristocratic organization of Greek society. The Greek philosophers held there was an unchanging world

because they lived in an unchanging society or in a society they wanted to be unchanging. This, it may be remarked in passing, is the genetic mode of refutation of an idea, viz., to hold that the social conditions that gave rise to the idea no longer exist. Whether it is a valid form of refutation we shall inquire later.

2. So there is no immutable, and philosophy has been deluded in seeking for it. Values exist only in experience, not beyond it. The past placing of values beyond experience has actually hindered their realization in experience. The reason given for these negative views is that knowledge is not isolated from overt action but is one with it. But is it, always?

3. There is no real conflict between science and religion because the historic religious view of the world is false and science alone through its method puts values into human experience where they belong. The alleged conflict between spirit and matter, mechanism and teleology, science and religion, is artificial. It is due to retaining Greek and Hebrew traditions that the real is the good and that the good is pre-existent and gives norms to human life. The alleged problem became acute in the seventeenth century. All the modern philosophers have tried in vain to solve it, retaining something of the religious tradition, such as, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, even Spencer, and the modern realists with their existences and essences and the more austere kind with their philosophical subject matter limited to universally valid propositions. Dr. Dewey has his own solution: take your values from science and discard the classical philosophical and religious views. But has science all the values?

4. Greek philosophy and the Christian religion accept the world as it is and enjoy it or endure it. Modern science controls experience. In so doing it makes the values real in experience that Greek philosophy and the

Christian religion find or sought in a transcendent world. So the transcendent world should be surrendered with its alleged cognitive certainty in order that practical security among the uncertainties of life may be won by scientific control. Does the control of the changing actual exclude the reality of the unchanging ideal?

5. The views of those who treat knowledge as correspondence between idea and antecedent fact are all wrong; such are the rationalists, the empiricists, and the realists. The views of those who regard ideas at work as the tools or instruments of action are correct; such are the pragmatists or instrumentalists. This correct view of ideas came to us from the scientific method of experimental inquiry. The knowledge that reproduces its object, like a photograph, is useless, except aesthetically. Realities are really events, not substances with inherent essences or qualities. Science does not tell us or try to tell us what things really are; in this it is wise; what is better, it gives us a way of understanding and controlling things. Another equally valid way of taking things is to enjoy them aesthetically. Modern physics, in particular, is dynamic in regarding its formulæ as dealing with relations, not static in regarding its formulæ as dealing with absolute space, time, and motion, as did Newton. But why are there events and what are they and their relations to each other?

6. There are no substances or essences with which as antecedent existences ideas can agree. Mathematics and formal logic represent only ideas at play, diverting themselves by their own activity. This is possible because these formal disciplines deal only with symbols. By using a symbol an idea can act without acting, so to speak. Symbolism is the greatest achievement of man but it is not to be regarded in a religious or mystical mood. Really, thinking is a mode of directing activity. Ideas and ideals

are only hypotheses to be tried out, not finalities. The heart of ideas is acting. The older rationalism and empiricism have missed the practical function of the idea. All ideas reaching conclusions are like machines making products. May symbols represent antecedent realities?

7. Historically speaking, the older rationalism did not do justice to the rôle of the senses. Empiricism did not do justice to the rôle of the reason. Kantianism did not do justice to the continuity of the senses and the reason in controlling experience. In contrast with all these, experimentalism is correct in turning knowledge into knowing by means of consequences. But may there not be immediate knowledge?

8. There is nothing sacrosanct even about "science" as a body of knowledge in distinction from its method. The instrumental theory of knowledge is a mode of enriching life. Man should be regarded as originative, as creative. The observation we make affects the thing observed, which does not remain fixed. Nature is inherently neither rational nor irrational but neutral and subject to man's influence. But is it better to naturalize man's intelligence as a tool of human improvement or to intellectualize Nature as a manifestation of Divine intelligence?

9. Intelligent action, or the experimental method of inquiry, is "the sole ultimate resource of mankind in every field whatsoever" (p. 252). The mind of man is a response to the doubtful as such. Pathologies of belief result when knowledge is divorced from action. Indeterminateness is objective. Problems arise in the union of the individual, — the discrete, and the relational, — the continuous. The æsthetic experience emphasizes the individual and the discrete. The common noun and the object of physics do not represent individual existences. The neo-realists are right in holding that even the emotional

or "tertiary" qualities belong to the objects themselves. Nature is a mixture of the precarious and the stable, having a mechanism that is stable which allows a purposiveness which is precarious. In man's intelligent action he may be regarded as free. The social and moral sciences require experimentation for progress. Our education too suffers from the divorce of knowledge and action, having isolated cultural work from trade training. May confidence in man's intelligent action be misplaced?

10. The good is to be constructed by man's intelligent action. Greek philosophy and the Christian religion have mistakenly supported the divorce of knowledge and action as well as dualism, which modern science has undermined. The problem of bringing the two worlds together is solved by applying experimental science. Utilitarianism, though not acceptable because of its egoism, has helped bridge the gap between the inner and the outer. Values are not likings; neither are they divorced from likings, but are intelligent likings, and there is no hierarchy among them. The supreme task is the formation of good judgment or taste. Both empiricism and rationalism omit the factor of guidance in ideas. We men really lack not so much the will to do the best we know as the will to know the best to do. We do control the technological but not the primary social values; the former are means to the latter as ends. In particular, the experimental method would make four great differences in social matters: (1) the past would be regarded as a tool, not a finality; (2) subjectivism and egoism would alike be rejected; (3) principles would be regarded as hypotheses; and (4) methods and means would be regarded as important as ends, economics not being separated from morality. Would not the denial of eternal values tend to emphasize the material rather than the ideal ends of life?

11. As a consequence of the Copernican revolution of Dewey, not Kant, which makes knowledge revolve about existence instead of existence revolving about knowledge, religion gives up rest in the eternal and philosophy gives up the quest for intellectual certainty. Religion becomes the devoted endeavor to realize the ideal possibilities of nature and man, and philosophy becomes the search for hypotheses to try out in the realization of values. Is this revolution in thought desirable because it is true? The issue is that between all the historic philosophies and theologies and that of experimental humanism.

V

Before coming to our estimate of these views, we may still pause for a while because of their importance, on Dr. Dewey's ideas about religion. On this subject he has written concerning himself as follows: "I was brought up in a conventionally evangelical atmosphere of the more 'liberal' sort; and the struggles that later arose between acceptance of that faith and the discarding of traditional and institutional creeds came from personal experiences and not from the effects of philosophical teaching. It was not, in other words, in this respect that philosophy either appealed to me or influenced me — though I am not sure that Butler's ANALOGY, with its cold logic and acute analysis, was not, in a reversed way, a factor in developing 'scepticism'."[1]

Later in the same paper he writes concerning his present views: . . . "I have not been able to attach much importance to religion as a philosophical problem, for the effect of that attachment seems to me in the end a subordination of candid philosophic thinking to the alleged but factitious needs of some special set of convictions. I have enough faith in the depth of the religious ten-

[1] Adams and Montague, *Contemporary American Philosophy*, p. 16.

dencies of men to believe that they will adapt themselves to any required intellectual change, and that it is futile (and likely to be dishonest) to forecast prematurely just what forms the religious interest will take as a final consequence of the great intellectual transformation that is going on. As I have been frequently criticized for undue reticence about the problems of religion, I insert this explanation: it seems to me that the great solicitude of many persons, professing belief in the universality of the need for religion proves that in fact they are moved more by partisan interest in a particular religion than by interest in religious experience."[1]

Having these things in mind, we turn again to THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY to find the mature formulation of Dr. Dewey's views on religion.

They may be summed up in the following eleven theses:

1. Historic religion is a compensatory reaction, representing one form of escape from peril. Instead of seeking to make the evil world better, it flees from reality, or at best, endures it as it is.

2. The experience of the mystics in seeking and supposing they find union with the absolute has no objective basis.

3. All values exist only in present experience, not in a transcendent world.

4. The real should not be identified with any preexistent good.

5. If religion would increase the values of human life, it must adopt the scientific method of control.

6. The feeling of certitude is too often confused with a certified situation. Man's love for certainty, his desire not to be unsettled and disturbed, leads to dogmatism, to accepting beliefs on authority, to intolerance, to fanaticism, to irresponsible dependence and sloth.

[1] Ibid., p. 20.

7. Christianity has mistakenly supported a dualistic philosophy and a divorce of knowledge from action.

8. Jesus is not a final authority. The following quotation contains the only specific reference in this discussion that Dr. Dewey makes to Jesus: "We are not, then, to get away from enjoyments experienced in the past and from recall of them, but from the notion that they are the arbiters of things to be further enjoyed. At present, the arbiter is found in the past, although there are many ways of interpreting what in the past is authoritative. Nominally, the most influential conception doubtless is that of a revelation once had or a perfect life once lived" (p. 272). Thus, Jesus lacks final authority in settling the moral and social issues of today, though his affirmations may be used as hypotheses. In this connection it is interesting to recall another statement, written in 1916, as follows, ". . . there is excellent adult authority for the conviction that for certain moral and intellectual purposes adults must become as little children."[1]

10. The conception of God as an antecedent Being or original Reality is not admitted even as an hypothesis. The term "God" is not a proper name but a common noun for all the uplifting social agencies productive of human values; he too falls within the ongoing process of change. Dr. Brightman writes on this point: "Dewey's thought, stated simply, is that we should be better off if we were to forget about whether there is a God or not and devote ourselves to bettering the state of human life by active social efforts. This is his practical substitute for God."[2] Concerning the teachings of Jesus and the existence of God, Professor Coe has applied somewhat similar but not identical views in his Social Theory of Religious Education and his What Is Christian Edu-

[1] *Democracy and Education*, p. 50.

[2] E. S. Brightman, *The Problem of God*, New York, 1930, p. 53.

CATION? He concludes the latter text with this "coda" concerning Christian education: "It is the systematic, critical examination and reconstruction of relations between persons, guided by Jesus' assumptions that persons are of infinite worth, and by the hypothesis of the existence of God, the Great Valuer of Persons." Dr. Dewey substitutes humanism for theism; Professor Coe retains theism as an hypothesis.

10. The religious attitude, truly regarded, is not the acceptance of what is given at the time; it is the sense of the possibilities of existence and the devotion to the cause of these possibilities, not their Cause. It is not a theory about the structure of the natural world. The ideal of perfection does not lose its claim over us when it can not be demonstrated to exist in the sense that the sun and stars exist. The truly religious attitude surrenders once for all beliefs about matters of fact, whether physical, social, or metaphysical. The one value in which it retains fixed belief is the worth of discovering the possibilities of the actual and of striving to realize them. "An idealism of action that is devoted to creation of a future, instead of to staking itself upon propositions about the past, is invincible. . . . The demand of righteousness for reverence does not depend upon ability to prove the existence of an antecedent Being who is righteous" (p. 304).

11. A religion set free from the quest for certitude would have four characteristics, namely, (1) it would not be defensive; (2) it would not be dogmatic; (3) it would manifest piety toward the actual; and (4) it would be without divisive pride.

(1) Religion has to be defensive so long as religious faith is bound up with doctrines regarding history and physical nature.

(2) For the same reason religion has been dogmatic.

The energies hitherto expended in defense of dogmas should be released to realize the possibilities of actual life. Unless religion becomes scientific, secularism will increase, and ideal interests will be compelled to retreat more and more. The other-worldliness of religious tradition should not be perpetuated.

(3) The proper object of piety is nature and society. These contain within themselves possibilities and means for their actualization. Nature is not to be worshipped as divine, even as by Spinoza. But nature may nevertheless evoke heartfelt piety, despite its defects and imperfections; it includes man, it is the source of ideals, of possibilities, of aspirations; it is alone the eventual abode of all goods. Speaking psychologically, with Schleiermacher, religion is in part the sense of dependence. This sense of dependence is really keener when we look for security in a changing world, such as we have, than when we look for certainty in a fixed world, such as we have not, but mistakenly believe in.

(4) There is pride of wealth, pride of power, pride of learning. But this pride of the zealously devout, of those who feel themselves learned in the express and explicit will of God, is the most exclusive and dangerous form of pride. One result of such pride is the historic isolation of the church from other social institutions. Philosophy has mistakenly exerted its influence in justifying backward present religious attitudes.

VI

So runs the argument in general concerning philosophy and in particular concerning religion. What shall we say concerning it?

One is almost appalled and affrighted at the magnitude of the proposed revolution in philosophy and religion. It would take long adequately to appreciate and to estimate

Dr. Dewey's experimental humanism. Classical philosophy and historic Christianity are transformed almost beyond recognition. They become human attitudes of experimentation in, and control of, a changing world. The categories of self and personality cease being the supreme realities and values. The supreme reality is events and the supreme value is method. Dewey's philosophy is an attitude and a technique in controlling change.

Briefly and as impartially as possible we will seek to indicate some of the weaknesses in these views. One feels in his writings that Dr. Dewey is genuine; he exemplifies his doctrine in his life; if we can not out-think him, he and his philosophy will out-live us. For convenience in presentation and discussion, our criticisms will be submitted in the form of eighteen propositions.

1. The genetic mode of refutation is unsatisfactory. Ideas that originated under one set of social conditions may be true under another set of social conditions. Thus, "Thou shalt not steal," originated under patriarchal, or perhaps monarchical conditions; it applies equally well under democratic conditions. Dr. Dewey says the origin of an idea does not justify belief in it. "Ideas derived from social castes and emotional revulsions are hardly reasons to be offered in justification of a belief" (p. 5). Then can they be offered in refutation of it? According to Spencer the idea that man has a soul arose from dreams in which the body remains where it is and the dreamer wanders far, and from reflections of the self in polished metals and the smooth surface of bodies of water. Let it be so. Would such origins disprove the validity of the idea? Further, it is worthy of note that a modern classical student of Plato, G. C. Field, holds that, while his moral and political speculations depend on the social conditions of his time, his metaphysics is independent of them.

"The most important part of the material with which he had to deal in his metaphysical or logical investigations does not vary from age to age or from one country to another."[1]

2. His denial of the objective reality of mysticism can not be proven by his own principles. In the mystical experience of prayer and communion man lays hold on an unfailing source of strength which he takes to be unchanging, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning." "O Thou that changeth not, abide with me." If it can not be proven that God is and changeth not, neither can it be disproven. Meantime, to a vast company the practice of the view works well in life, and so passes the pragmatic test of truth in James's WILL TO BELIEVE. Man does not escape peril but he may escape the fear of it.

3. But we have evidence that some things do not change. How can the irrevocable *past* change? How can *truth* change? Our view of truth may change. But "once true, always true." "Jesus Christ, *the same*, yesterday, today, and forever." How can *universal extension* change? How can *duration* change its rate? How can the multiplication table change? Or, mathematical relations generally? $2+2=4$ not by the device of man but by the unchanging nature of things, or the will of God. How can *principles* change? Even the doctrine of Heraclitus that "all things change" can be true only if the principle of change does not change. If the only permanent is change, we have at the least the changeless as well as change, and the more the world changes the more it remains the same changing world. Even if man *depends* on change, and his sense of dependence is quickened by the fact of universal change, the fact of his dependence does not change. Thus at least two changeless facts

[1] Field, G. C., *Plato and His Contemporaries*, New York, 1930, p. 77.

would remain for man, namely, change, and his dependence on it.

4. The continuity of knowledge and action may in some cases well be questioned. Dr. Dewey connects all knowledge with the physical. ". . . the idea which connects thinking and knowing with some principle or force that is wholly separate from connection with physical things will not stand examination . . ." (p. 5). Now when I know myself by *introspection*, where is the physical action? When I know by *intuition* that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, where is the physical action? When I know today what my *purpose* is for tomorrow, where is the action? When I recollect today what I did yesterday, where is the action? It is of course admitted in all such mental activity some brain activity may be involved. But this is not the kind of action Dr. Dewey means. He means knowing is proving an hypothesis by experimenting with things. Does a son know his mother's love by experimentation?

5. Science is no substitute for religion. Values are felt, and can not be determined by the scientific method. Science may make the world a neighborhood; it can not make it a brotherhood. Chemistry can teach us the uses of chlorine; it can not teach us whether to use it to make liquid gas to destroy life or to purify water to save life. The desire to put more values into human experience is not a product of the scientific method. There is love somewhere in the universe that quickens love.

6. The Greeks and the Christians controlled as well as accepted the world. The Greeks not only accepted the world and enjoyed it; they also controlled matter and experience in their works of art. Likewise Christianity, in accepting the reality of the transcendent, has not failed to control human society measurably in the direction of the ideal. Even if knowledge were continuous with

action, it would be a *non-sequitur* to conclude that therefore we are not to *believe* in the transcendent. We can both control the actual and maintain the real existence of the ideal. We do not need to destroy faith to make room for knowledge.

7. The teleology in this philosophy is blind. Reality is reduced to events. But why do events happen? They just do. To what end do they happen? There is none. The universe is purposive, without a purpose, or a purposer. The events of nature are utilizable by the creative intelligence of man as means to his own ends, that is all. But how can we explain the origin of man's purpose to control events apart from a creative Intelligence other than and greater than his own? Otherwise, the greater comes from the less, the known from the unknown, and the thinker from the thoughtless.

8. This philosophy fails to distinguish between the nature of truth and the test of truth. Truth may be tested in many ways; one way is by self-consistency; another way is by successful leading to consequences. But the truth is not constituted by its tests; it is only made evident thereby. The idea that there is a knife in my pocket is already true or false; the presentation of the knife makes the inherent truth of the idea manifest; the inability to present the knife proves the idea was false from the beginning. The true idea is not true because it can be verified but because it represents the fact as it is; the false idea is not false because it can not be verified but because it misrepresents the fact. Truth is prior to the act that proves it. And the theory of truth as correspondence between idea and fact has never kept man from changing either untrue ideas or unwelcome facts.

9. The laws of thought as formulated by logic are more than symbols; they are truths; they are realities. A thing is identical with itself at the time and in the place in-

dicated. So we think because we are convinced that so it is. Our thinking here lays hold on reality. A thing is not its own contradiction. This proposition is thought because it is held to be true; it is not true because it is thought. Between two contradictories there is no middle ground. Define what you mean by "open," and the door is either open or not open. So it is, and so we think. The laws of thought are the laws of things; they report things as they are. There is much symbolism in formal logic but formal logic is more than symbolism, more than ideas at play. And the same with mathematics.

10. Experimentalism is inadequate as a seat of intellectual authority. The objections to experimentalism as the seat of intellectual authority are (1) that it denies immediacy of knowledge; (2) it does not provide for the transmission of knowledge once attained; and (3) we are always seeking but never finding. According to experimentalism, the present lacks authority because its ideas have not yet been tried out; the past lacks authority because conditions have changed since its ideas arose; and the future must lack authority because we are never just there. Only a method of attack on problems remains. But we do have immediacy of knowledge in axioms and other self-evident propositions. And truth once true is always true and may be transmitted as truth, though requiring to be newly experienced and applied under changed social conditions. By making knowing wait upon the event of experimentation, experimentalism is ever seeking and never finding. Experiment*ing* in a chang*ing* world gives us no body of authoritative acceptable truth but only a grow*ing* body of ideas to be ever try*ing* out. On such a basis, gone is finality, an attitude of problem-solving, with the conditions of the problem constantly changing, alone remaining.

11. "The naturalization of intelligence" can hardly be effected by the theory that nature itself is neither rational nor irrational but amenable to man's reason. For here is *clearly a dualism between neutral nature and intelligent man.* How then is intelligence naturalized? To be naturalized on this basis, intelligence would have to be rendered unintelligent and cease to be itself.

There is possibly a better way out. Nature is amenable to reason. Then nature is not neutral. Then nature and intelligence are of one piece. But intelligence is spirit. Then nature is one of the manifestations of spirit. And nature and man being akin, it is the same spirit that manifests itself in both nature and man. Thus, instead of the naturalization of intelligence we get the spiritualization of nature. But this is idealism and not pragmatism.

12. Perhaps confidence in man, in his intelligent action, in his method of experimental inquiry, is misplaced. It was not man's intelligence that made man himself; and yet somehow he was made. The method of experimental inquiry is an infant, as old as Darwin, perhaps as old as Galileo. But man's progress is hoary. As the thickness of a postage stamp lying on the top of Washington Monument is to the height of the monument, so is man's intelligent control of nature by experimentation to his preceding progress. Life had existed on the earth some six hundred million years before man appeared. Progressive changes came for æons before man's conscious experimentation began. The sources of man's progress are prior to experimental science. That science has made change more rapid is indisputable. That change and progress are synonymous is questionable. There is no objection to man relying upon himself to improve himself just so he opens himself to guidance and energizing from every available source. There are reasonable objections

to man's relying upon his own unaided efforts for self-improvement.

13. Social experimentation may prove to be a menace. Admittedly there is a moral and social lag in our day. Our science, our inventions, and our industries have far outrun our democracy, our morality, and our sociality. But maybe it is not the lack of experimentation in social matters, the unwillingness to reject conventions and taboo taboos that causes our trouble. Our social experimentation with the commandments is notorious. So far from getting us forward, it is apparently putting us backward. The new morality is indistinguishable from the old immorality. Lippmann's PREFACE TO MORALS is atavistic. What we lack is not so much the will to know the best to do by new trials as the will to do the best we know by old trials. The practice of the doctrine of Freud has caused more complexes than it has cured. Trying out the validity of the commandments afresh hardly seems to be "intelligent." Yet one might do so in Dewey's name, whether rightly or wrongly. The method of communistic Russia — and with the new Russia Dr. Dewey is very sympathetic — hardly seems to be intelligent, though it may be experimental. Dr. Dewey's policy of social experimentation needs a program of where to begin, and how. The fact is, it is only characters that are true to known moral truths that can advance our knowledge of the unknown moralities. And my conviction is that when such advance is made it will be found to be a rediscovery or a new application of something Jesus and the ethical geniuses of the race taught long ago.

14. Men appear to be ends; they are more than agents and means. Personality is our supreme category both of reality and of value. We know personality, and we know nothing higher or so high, and so its worth is absolute.

All lesser things have value as related to persons. These views are basic in any ethical view of life. Dr. Dewey's philosophy omits treatment of the self and personality. There are no ends as distinct from means in his system. Rather in a world of events subject to partial control by experimentation, ends are means and means are ends. "The various modifications that would result from adoption in social and humane subjects of the experimental way of thinking are perhaps summed up in saying that it would place *method and means* upon the level of importance that has, in the past, been imputed exclusively to ends" (pp. 278–279). If man as an end in himself is no more than man as a means, then his value is not abiding but is dissipated in a world of changing events, there is no hierarchy of values, and no warrant for the prospect of immortality. "We came like water and like wind we go," and, when the earth is a frozen ball in some future astronomical age, "the caravan will have reached the nothing it set out from."

15. No real *Ought* appears here, there is only intelligent desire. The constitution of things does not sanction the good, or guarantee its ultimate victory. Man is not held responsible by any Ultimate Being or by nature. He is not indebted to any Infinite Personality for his being. He is a child of neutral nature. His responsibility is strictly limited to intelligent action in a social group composed of members like himself. There is human fraternity only to the extent that it exists as a fact or as a potentiality of human nature, and it is not grounded in any divine paternity. This ethic says that to be selfish is to be narrow and individualistic; to be unselfish is to be social. Why should one be social? The answer is, that is the way to show the intelligence one has in the control of experience. Selfishness and unselfishness are unrelated to any divine standard.

16. The "Copernican revolution," making human knowledge revolve about existence instead of existence revolve about a transcendent knower, is dubious radical empiricism. But there has been no disproof of the existence of the Eternal. There has been a claim that belief in eternal values has not been beneficial; this claim may be disputed in the light of the historic influence of such belief in contrast with that of positivism. Idealism is correctly presented as holding that all is known, but it does not hold that knowledge is all; feelings, acts, and things may be known but they are not knowledge, only its objects. Idealism holds that to be is to be experienced but that man's experience is only fragmentary and that a completed experience embraces man's. This idealistic position does give poignancy to the problems of error, ugliness, evil, and man's freedom; but these problems are not insoluble theoretically on an idealistic basis, and they are not practically easy on the basis of the "revolution." All philosophies agree that evil should be fought, except Satanism; they disagree as to what evil is. Dr. Dewey's doctrine of man's freedom is that society should be so reconstructed economically and otherwise that man should have freedom to express himself intelligently; and so be externally free from limiting social restraint; but such expression is a determined response to the situation and does not involve man's freedom to choose. And the "idealism of action," not of ideas, for which the "revolution" stands, is not rejected by the idealistic philosophy — only its triumph is not left precarious.

17. This philosophy does not recognize the distinctive function of philosophy. If thinking is only a function of action, then all speculative thinking is futile, idle, and vain, and philosophers should seek to determine not the nature of reality as a whole but which hypotheses to try

next in social experimentation. But will man cease theorizing? And should philosophers become practical sociologists? Who then would procure for us, God, Freedom, and Immortality? Shall we not rather recognize that man's intelligence has a speculative and transcendent function as well as a practical and immediate function? And even that the theoretical function faces reality as a whole while the practical function deals with a part of the world? On this basis the practical life of man is completed by the theoretical and the temporal by the eternal.

18. Concerning Dr. Dewey's specific treatment of religion, before commenting, let us note the following quotations: "Theologians of the Christian Church adopted this view [i.e. a life of knowing apart from and above a life of doing] in a form adapted to their religious purposes. The perfect and ultimate reality was God, to know Him was eternal bliss" (p. 293). And again, " . . . by definition, such [ideal] possibilities are abstract and remote. They have no concern nor traffic with natural and social objects that are concretely experienced. It is not possible to avoid the impression that the idea of such a realm is simply the hypostatizing in a wholesale way of the fact that actual existence has its own possibilities. But in any case devotion to such remote and unattached possibilities simply perpetuates the other-worldliness of religious tradition, although its other-world is not one supposed to exist. Thought of it is a refuge, not a resource" (pp. 305–306).

Concerning these and the other views of Dr. Dewey on religion as indicated previously, we may observe (1) that he is probably mistaken in finding the origins of Christianity so much in Greek philosophy with its two worlds and so little in Hebraism, Judaism, and the life and teachings of Jesus; (2) that he misreads religion in saying it is not

concerned with present experience; (3) likewise in saying that the other-world of religion is one not supposed to exist; (4) likewise in saying that religion's other-world is not thought of as a resource; and (5) that he misses the very genius of religion in holding it properly to be only a devotion to the realizing of possibilities instead of being the worship of God as the Father of man and the service of man as the child of God. The new religion of Humanism is based upon the views of Dr. Dewey and other similar views; but this religion is not really new, being as old as August Comte, and it is not so much religion which binds man to God as social ethics which binds man to man.

VII

Before leaving, however, Dr. Dewey's QUEST FOR CERTAINTY which he regards as a futile search for the non-existent; before leaving his finding of practical security by experimental inquiry in a changing natural and social world, let us not be inappreciative. He is a profound, original, and sincere thinker. He intends to be unbiased. Our criticism is a measure of his appeal; we try to supplement his position lest we adopt it. Moreover, he practices his experimental social philosophy. He is the head of the League for Independent Political Action, he is the head of the People's Lobby at Washington, he is the chairman of the Committee opposed to Military Instruction in the High Schools, he marched for Woman Suffrage before it was popular, he assists South American Republics to understand each other, his advice is sought by countries whose social frontiers are changing, like Russia, Mexico, China, and Turkey, he writes freely for the press on the issues of the day. We take no stock in the scathing attack on Dr. Dewey of Benjamin de Casseres[1], who describes him as "the man nobody reads," "the

[1] "Something to Argue About," *The Thinker*, April, 1930.

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champion obscurantist," "the pleonastic platitudinarian," who has "the magic of mummery." This is the ebullition of a man who tries to read and fails to understand.

Dr. Dewey's influence on philosophy is stimulating, provocative, wholesome; tending as Cicero said of Socrates, to bring philosophy down from heaven to earth. Having once been an absolute idealist himself he knows what he is rejecting. His is a counter-conversion in both philosophy and religion.

His influence on religion is socializing, ethicizing, humanizing, practicalizing. He will not be successful in leading us to think less about God; he will be successful in leading us to think more about man. His message is that of Leigh Hunt in *Abou Ben Adhem*. It is a part of the social gospel of the Hebrew prophets and the prophet of Nazareth, without their heavenly dynamic and full-orbed vision of a transcendent and resplendent Reality embracing our temporal order, the emblem of which once made human flesh radiant. It is possible that many religious people, drawing their inspiration from the spiritual interpretation of the universe, will be able to profit by Dr. Dewey's technique in handling problems.

VIII

Principal Publications of John Dewey

The School and Society — University of Chicago Press, 1900

Ethics (with J. H. Tufts) — Henry Holt and Co., 1908

Influence of Darwin and Other Essays — Henry Holt and Co., 1910

How We Think — D. C. Heath, 1910

Democracy and Education — Macmillan, 1916

Essays in Experimental Logic — University of Chicago Press, 1916

Reconstruction in Philosophy — Henry Holt and Co., 1920

Human Nature and Conduct — Henry Holt and Co., 1922
Experience and Nature — Open Court Publishing Co., 1925
The Public and Its Problems — Henry Holt and Co., 1927
The Quest for Certainty — Minton Balch & Company, New York, 1929

Consult also the following:

Several Authors, John Dewey, The Man and His Philosophy, Harvard University Press, 1930
Ratner, Joseph, Character and Events, New York, 1929
Ratner, Joseph, The Philosophy of John Dewey, Henry Holt and Co., 1929
Thomas and Schneider, a Bibliography of John Dewey, Columbia University Press, 1929

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